

4-12-2009, Easter B
Chapelwood UMC, Lake Jackson

Out of the Ashes
Comes Victory
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Those of you who were here last Sunday will recognize that this is the Psalm I used for my text last week as well. Last week I lifted up the verse, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.” I spoke of the experience of being reduced to ashes by being judged and rejected by those who aren’t really in a position to judge, and I talked about how out of the ashes of rejection comes the day of vindication, when God reveals the truth and rejection is turned into praise and acclamation from God, who alone is worthy to judge us.

Today is the day of vindication for Christ. “This is **the** day which the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” This is the day of victory. This is the day that the rejected cornerstone became the chief cornerstone. This is the day that the one who was condemned and crucified for acting and speaking with the authority of the Son of God was revealed to be the Son of God.

This is the day when the truth arose triumphant from the grave. They thought they had buried the truth. They thought the truth would never see the light of day again. But the truth can only be hidden for a time. Sooner or later, the truth rises up for all to see.

On Easter Sunday, when Mary Magdalene stood weeping at the empty tomb, she didn’t know the truth. She thought that the authorities had desecrated the dead body of Jesus by taking him out of the tomb and throwing his body away. But then a man approached her. When he spoke her name, suddenly she realized the truth. She knew that before her stood the Teacher whom she loved with all her heart and that he was alive. At that moment she knew that “This is the day which the Lord has made...” and she rejoiced and was glad for this day.

She went to the disciples and told them the truth. But they didn’t believe the truth. They were certain that she was just a hysterical woman. It wasn’t until that evening, when Jesus suddenly appeared among them and said, “Peace be with you,” and he showed them his hands and his side, that the disciples finally understood the truth that Jesus had been teaching them, that he would be crucified and that he would rise from the dead. Finally they understood that, “This is the day that the Lord has made,” and they rejoiced and were glad.

They told Thomas the truth, and he didn’t believe them. It wasn’t until Christ again appeared to them and Thomas saw him with his own eyes, when Christ invited him to touch the wounds in his hand and his side, that Thomas finally knew the truth, and he fell down on his knees and cried out, “My Lord, and my God.” That day Thomas knew that “This is the day the Lord has made...” and Thomas rejoiced and was glad in it.

In his letter to the Corinthians Paul reported that after appearing to the disciples Jesus appeared to 500 brothers and sisters at one time. Then he appeared to his brother James. Then he appeared to others who became apostles. And finally, Paul says, “He appeared also to me.” Paul had not believed the truth. He had persecuted those who

proclaimed the truth. But, on the road to Damascus, Christ appeared to Paul, and suddenly Paul knew the truth. He knew that Easter truly was “The day that the Lord has made...” and he rejoiced and was glad in it.

And so it goes, on and on, generation after generation. Some people believe the truth. But no one knows the truth until they are confronted with the Risen Lord. That is the day that they know the truth, and they know that, “This is the day the Lord has made...” and they rejoice and are glad in it.

The truth is that Christ is the Son of God. The truth is that Christ has been resurrected to eternal life. The truth is that in Christ we also have eternal life.

Now I need to explain what eternal life is. Most people think of eternal life as everlasting life. While eternal life is everlasting, it is much more than that.

When I was a young man I used to try to imagine everlasting life. I would try to imagine a life that goes on and on without end. It was so overwhelming that I would get weak in the knees and dizzy-headed. It got to the point that when I would start thinking about it, I would try to force myself not to think about it. Sometimes I was successful, and sometimes I wasn't. I reached the point where the idea of eternal life became frightening to me.

One day I was driving to work, when I started thinking about it. I tried to stop, but I couldn't. I started getting dizzy. I had to pull over to the side of the road. As I sat there, with my stomach churning and my head spinning, I said, “Lord, I don't want to live forever. Just let me live until I die, and when I die, let me be dead.” The still, small voice of the Lord spoke to me and said, “All right, Wesley. Would you like to die today.” Well, Becky and I had just gotten married. We were ecstatically happy. I said, “No, Lord, not today. I want to live today.” The Spirit said, “All right. How about tomorrow? Would you like to die tomorrow?” I said, “No, Lord. Not tomorrow. I'm enjoying life too much to die tomorrow.” The Spirit said, “How about the day after tomorrow?” I said, “No, Lord. I don't want to die the day after tomorrow. My life is too good to end it so soon.” And the Spirit said, “Wesley, that's what eternal life is. It is life that is so good that you don't want it to end.”

That's when I understood the difference between everlasting life and eternal life. Everlasting life could be a horrible thing. Who wants to live forever if you are miserable? But eternal life is a life that is so good that you don't want it to end. And the good news is that it won't end.

On Easter Sunday the truth was revealed. And the truth is that God has created us for eternal life. God intends to give us a life that is so good that we don't end. If we have entered into eternal life in Christ, every day is “The day that the Lord has made...” And we will rejoice and be glad in every day.

Even though Christ has won the victory, there are still battles to be fought. Evil is still at work in the world and in our lives. However, the evil has already lost the war. Revelation tells us that a battle was fought in heaven between the archangel Michael and Satan and his angels. Satan lost and was cast out of heaven and down to earth. Revelation 12:12 says, “Rejoice then, you heavens and those who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

Satan has no power. He has lost the battle. All he can do is to cause us to forget the joy we have in Christ. So, he works hard to cause us to become angry and frustrated or discouraged.

I am the oldest of four brothers. I was the third parent. My mother was a teacher. My father was a traveling salesman. I was in charge when they were gone. I didn't have the authority to spank my brothers when they misbehaved. So I just beat them up. I was bigger, stronger and faster than all three of them combined. My next brother resented the fact that he couldn't defeat me in a fight. But he found another way to control me. He knew which buttons to push to make me angry. When he did, I would beat him up. But he got some kind of perverse pleasure out of his ability to make me angry. When I was about fourteen, I was trying to be a serious follower of Christ. I decided that as a Christian I should stop being angry with my brothers and hurting them. I announced to them that I would never lose my temper with them or hurt them or boss them again. By the grace of God I was able to keep that commitment. But that just frustrated my brother. He had lost his one power over me, his ability to anger me. One day, he was determined to make me angry. He spent the whole day doing everything he could to make me so angry I would hurt him. Finally I said, "Okay, Wayne, I see what you are doing. I will fight you. But I won't do anything but protect myself from you. I will not hurt you." So we went to the front yard and went at it. (We lived in the country.) Wayne pulled every dirty trick in the book to try to make me lose control. He knew he couldn't defeat me. That wasn't his goal. His goal was to cause me to become angry so that he could regain control over me. He failed. He finally gave up, and we became friends that day.

Satan is like my brother. He cannot defeat us. Christ has won. We have eternal life. Satan cannot defeat us. He can take the joy of life from us. When we allow the battles of daily living to cause us to be frustrated or angry, Satan has taken control of us.

The one thing you can say about Satan is that he doesn't quit. He won't stop until his time runs out.

But Satan is a loser. He couldn't knock Christ out, and he can't knock us out either. The only way he can win is for us to throw in the towel and quit. If we will hang in there until the final bell, the victory is assured.

There are days when we do grow weary. On those days, just remember that, in spite of all that Satan has done, life is good. It is so good that we want it go on forever. That is the truth. We know it is the truth because Christ has risen. Out of the ashes of death has come victory and eternal life. On those days when Satan is pummeling away at you, stand up straight and tall, look him in the eyes and say, "This is the day that the Lord has made. (I will) rejoice and be glad in it!"

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